

workers voice



Al Matla, Kuwait - This is the future that capitalist civilisation offers humanity

And now for The War After the War

The Gulf War is over. The victims were not the Al Sabahs who continued their lives of luxury whilst the carnage continued. It was not indeed the ruling class in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Britain, the USA or even the PLO, the organisation of the Palestinian bourgeoisie. No, it was as always the working class which paid. First as Palestinian, Pakistani, Bangla Deshi and Egyptian refugees from Kuwait, then as Iraqi and Palestinian workers killed in the bombing. But that will not be the end of the misery. Japan's ruling class have promised to pay a quarter of the cost of the Gulf War. If they do it will be only through more intensive exploitation of their workforce.

On top of this the capitalist crisis promises to reach new depths, bringing mass starvation to Africa and reducing millions more around the world including Europe and the USA to subsistence levels. This must be resisted by workers everywhere. The Gulf War show what capitalism has to offer. Our task must be to construct our own new world order - an international working class community where exploitation and war are banished forever.

The War Behind the War

Behind the history of capitalism, its military and political conflicts, there lurks economic competition. Allies are defended and abandoned according to the principle of economic, military and political advantage. However, this simple truth takes on a complex form in this complicated world of economic interpenetration and dependency, which itself is the result of previous competition.

The war that is just over is a case in point. (a long time to come). There is no doubt that the primary cause of the war was the struggle to control oil, but this in itself is a global issue. The Iraqi attempt to gain control of Kuwaiti oil supplies was as nothing to the USA's

defence of its Pax Americana in the Middle East which has left it in military occupation of an area which holds 60 per cent of the world's oil supplies. On top of all this has been the US aim to ensure that its own former allies pay for the building of its "new world order".

Iraq's Aims

In the war before the war, the US-instigated Iran-Iraq war, Iraq gained a little territory (later to be returned to Iran) and a lot of debt. To pay its debts when the price of oil, its major source of income, was at a relative low (\$16 per barrel), Iraq would have had to make

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Capitalism's Crisis Deepens: "Recession" is Official

The War on the Home Front

While the media saturated us with lies and "disinformation" during the war to establish the USA's "New World Order" certain facts about the war at home - the class war - were given no more than a passing mention.

First, on the working class front. The worst unemployment figures for almost ten years were steadily mounting. Building Society repossessions - already at an all-time high - increased even further. The obstinate mass opposition to the Poll Tax has forced the Tories to "rethink" their policy (14 million people, over a third of those liable to pay, have not paid either in whole or part). The cost of living has continued to rise and the consumer 'boom' is over. The money advice centres (themselves being closed down for lack of funds) are overflowing with desperate people up to their necks in debt. At the same time workers are being told yet again that they should accept wage cuts (wage rises lower than inflation) in order to help the bosses reduce their production costs - otherwise they will find they have "priced themselves out of a job".

On the capitalist front more and more businesses are going bust. (Last year there were 75% more company bankruptcies than in 1989, itself a record year.) All sorts of firms, from Intasun and its airline and transnational con-

glomerates like Polly Peck to the small-time back street tyre fitter, have been affected. For the firms which have still survived the CBI reported "stagnating" profits for 1989 and 1990 and is now predicting a decline in manufacturing investment of 16% this year. All the official forecasts for UK output (GDP) this year predict that remarkable achievement "minus growth" - in other words, less output than last year. By the second quarter of this year the CBI envisages that non-oil GDP will be down by 2.2 per cent on last year. Manufacturing production as a whole is expected to fall by 4.5%. Here the UK is not alone. As the following table shows, "minus growth" is being experienced by all the major capitalist states outside of Germany and Japan.

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INDUSTRIAL GROWTH FOR THE SIX MAJOR WESTERN CAPITALIST STATES

(base = 100 in 1985)

	Nov '89	Nov '90	% change in one year
Japan	121	129	+6.8
Germany	113	120	+5.6
Italy	120	116	-3.4
USA	115	113	-0.3
France	111	110	-0.8
UK	110	107	-2.8

Source: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 1991

The Pfennig Drops

Stirrings of The Class Struggle in East Germany

It seems so long ago since the revolting orgy of nationalist flag-waving, so long since the sickening spectacle of the euphoria which greeted the downfall of the G.D.R. and the reunification of Germany which ensued. We revolutionaries in the west watched with fascinated horror, as the victims of Stalinism became dupes of Kohl, the Pied Piper who led them to what they thought was the Magic Mountain of consumerist capitalist prosperity, but what instead was to be a raging free market torrent, where many would drown like rats.

They thought they would get Mercedes and retain cheap public transport, thought they'd get western wages but keep subsidised consumer prices. This political naivety, a product of 40 years of Stalinism, which characterised all sectors of the population in the former G.D.R., explains the rapidity of the drive towards unification of Germany. It also explains the minimal proletarian resistance as the working class sank its interests into that of the amorphous "people's revolution". Communists, like ourselves and our comrades like the **Gruppe Internationalistische Kommunisten**, often found ourselves bracketed with the former Stalinists by those we tried to influence¹. German nationalism and free market ideology seemed to have overwhelmingly triumphed.

Reality: the Great Teacher

Even as late as the autumn, when Kohl's C.D.U (Christian Democratic Union) Party was returned to power, with an even bigger majority in the former G.D.R. than it gained in the old Federal Republic (West Germany), it was clear that illusions were still strong that prosperity was "just around the corner"; today such dreams are turning into nightmares. It is impossible to give accurate figures, since the German government excludes the former G.D.R. from calculations of unemployment, inflation etc, due to the "exceptional conditions", but the suicide figure ("successes" are up 60%) is enough to indicate that social misery in eastern Germany is rife.

Unemployment: There are at least 2 millions unemployed out of a workforce of 9 millions, and many predictions argue that 50% of the workforce could be on the dole by July. This will be an all-time historical high, beating even the worst figures of the inter-war period. The main reason for this is the total collapse of the ex-G.D.R.'s former markets in eastern Europe including the Soviet Union.

Inflation: As prices rise to western levels, inflation since the currency union of last June is estimated at nearly 50%. In essential areas, which hit the poorest more, it is greater: transport costs rose 300%, electricity 80%, rents by over 100%... Wages have stubbornly refused to rise anywhere near western levels in compensation.

Workers in the East were told that western capital would pour into the former G.D.R., and soon, using the pool of highly skilled labour, would raise living standards to west-

ern levels. How cruel has the reality been! It is true that some money has come into the G.D.R.. In the first place the German government is spending DM 102 billions on infrastructural projects such as roads, telecommunications, etc. And private capital has gone into hotels, restaurants, shops etc. But as far as private investment in production has gone, the results have been derisory. There has been a 50% decrease in industrial produc-



The face of disillusionment: German metalworkers in a Berlin demonstration for 65% of West German levels.

tion in the former G.D.R. in just over six months and even the latest government report predicts a further decline of about one sixth.

West German capital has simply used the former G.D.R. - so far - as a dumping ground for its own industrial production, driving many of the less efficient plants in the east to the wall. The well-publicised exceptions, such as the takeover of the Trabant works by Volkswagen are precisely that - exceptions. Much more common is the example of Karl Zeiss. This famous optical firm had two plants before the Second World War; one in the east, the other in the west. After 45 years of separation the western firm bought back the eastern plant at Jena from the Treuhand - the agency for privatisation in the east which has sold 4,000 firms and has so far privatised 700 - and promptly closed the bulk of it down, leaving 15,000 workers out of work. The capitalist logic behind this sale was to prevent any competitor of Carl Zeiss purchasing a low-cost plant which rival the western company. The idea that only the "backward" industries, with "lazy" workers would suffer was cruelly shattered.

Another example was Interflug, the former G.D.R. airline, which competed with many of the routes of Lufthansa, the West German air company. They did not want to (or could not afford to) buy it. In time-honoured tradition they put pressure on the state capitalist agency to stop sales of plant and routes to foreign, competing airlines, like British Airways.

Further examples could be quoted at length; Practika of Dresden, Europe's only camera manufacture - closed. The shipyards at Rostock, employing 20,000 workers, closed. And some of these, such as Practika, were not Stalinist smokestack industries, but ones which had been able to compete successfully in western markets. The capitalist crisis which brought down the Soviet Union's east European empire is also threatening the West. This

up to 75% of western levels.

All these struggles and actions, though welcome, demonstrated a very low level of consciousness, simply talking about "broken promises" and demanding that they be kept. But Kohl cannot even keep his promises to western Germans. Despite the election promises the public sector borrowing requirement has been raised to DM140 billions so that income tax was recently raised by 7% in Germany, and interest rates have had to be raised, to protect the international value of the mark. So the likelihood of promises being kept to the eastern workers is non-existent. The amount of capital necessary to reconstruct eastern Germany into a free market economy cannot be forthcoming for many, many years. In the meantime social convulsions will continue to intensify, creating the opportunities for revolutionary intervention in all parts of the country.

Footnote

[1] For details of previous interventions carried out by both the **International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party** (of which the CWO is the British affiliate) see *Workers Voice* 50, (which contains the text of our main intervention in Eastern Europe and is now available in German, French Italian, Czech, Spanish and Slovene - offers to translate it into other Eastern European languages would be welcome!) as well as *Workers Voice* 52 and 53. *Workers Voice* 55 contained both a leaflet given out by the **Internationalist Communist Group (G.I.K.)** in eastern Germany and a report of the situation there in the summer. For contact with the G.I.K. write only as follows:

Postfach 536
A - 1061 Wien
Austria

The Worm Turns

Recent workers' struggles in the former G.D.R.

Recently there have been the first, welcome signs, that the population, and particularly the workers, in the former G.D.R. are losing their political innocence. There have been riots against rent rises in Berlin, and the handing back of property to former (i.e. pre-1945) owners. Women have demonstrated against the new restrictions on the right to abortion and measures limiting free nursery care. But more importantly, the proletariat has started to define itself as a class, and fight for its interests as a class.

In Rostock the shipyard workers took to the streets in protest when the closure of the yards was announced. They managed to spread their struggle and obtain a partial general strike in the town.

In Jena the workers at Karl Zeiss took over the factory and spilled onto the streets, demanding the cancellation of their purchase by their western "sister" firm.

In Berlin 200,000 workers, mainly engineers struck and 20,000 demonstrated to demand an end to redundancies and for wages to be made

International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

The Platform and statutes of the Bureau are now available in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Bengali and Farsi. The Bureau also publishes a central organ in English, **COMMUNIST REVIEW** as well as **Revue Communiste** in French, **Internationalist Notes** in Farsi and **Prometeo** and **Battaglia Comunista** in Italian. Please write to the appropriate address below (PCInt for Internationalist Notes)

CWO BM Box CWO, London WC1N 3XX.
Partito Comunista Internazionale, CP 1753,
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South Africa

Apartheid to Go: Capitalism to Stay

The announcement by the South African President, F.W. de Klerk on 1st February that three more of the central pillars of apartheid are to be scrapped is a continuation of the South African capitalists' strategy of ending apartheid to save capitalism. As we have shown in previous editions of the paper (see *Workers' Voice* 51 and 54) apartheid has become a threat to the very existence of South African capitalism itself. Just as democracy was "conceded" in the nineteenth century to European workers to ideologically undermine their struggle against Europe's capitalists now the South African capitalists, spearheaded by the multinational bosses want to do the same thing. Conceding political "freedom" masks the economic and social prison which workers face under capitalism. Apartheid thus has to go and a more democratic system of capitalist exploitation has to be introduced in its place.

Whilst the multinationals hope to benefit from a more pliant workforce, the removal of the laws in question will principally benefit black capitalists, and after their repeal the barriers to the development of black capitalists and their businesses will be removed. They will now have the same rights and privileges as white capitalists. This is the real meaning of the abolition of the Group Areas Act and the

Race Classification Act. Both acts were passed in 1950 when the Afrikaner nationalist government was consolidating the system of exploitation based on cheap migrant labour. In those days the idea of a black capitalist class was anathema to the Nationalists. Afrikaner capitalism was then in its infancy and saw its interests as being in the continued use of a system of cheap, colonial-style, unskilled labour. When the "classical" imperialist powers like Britain and France, under pressure from the USA, were abandoning colonialism for more subtle imperialist methods the Afrikaner bourgeoisie were developing their own form of it. The rise of a black bourgeoisie was seen by them as a competitive threat which would undermine the whole system. The political forces which supported the rise of the black capitalist class such as the ANC, the South African Communist Party and the Liberals were banned and silenced. These laws were aimed at keeping the African peoples solely as a proletariat, and their stupidity, even in capitalist terms, which the liberals clearly pointed out at the time, has been amply demonstrated in the intervening years.

The Land Act, which is the third act to be abolished, forbids Africans - who make up 80% of the population - to own land in all but about 10% of the country. This act actually

dates from a much earlier period and was passed in 1913. Its purpose was similar to that of the enclosure of the common lands in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was to drive subsistence farmers off the land and force them to become wage labourers. Capital was unable to establish itself without this wage labour and the Land Act was aimed at creating the landless proletarians which South African capitalism required. The three decades following the enacting of this law saw the almost total elimination of African farmers owning their own land and cattle. It also eliminated those farming land owned by whites on the sharecropping basis known as the "on-the-half" system in which half the harvest went as rent to the white landowner. These people too were transformed into wage labourers and the 7.3% of the land then "reserved" for Africans became the reservoirs of labour for factories, farms and mines. This act has long since achieved its purpose. It has created the proletariat. To abolish it now will introduce a minor safety valve for some blacks to become farmers or for the existing black bourgeoisie (i.e. ANC leaders and backers) to buy houses in hitherto restricted "white" areas.

As far as the working class is concerned the rescinding of these laws will not make a great

deal of difference (police harassment under them has been almost stopped). The new freedoms are essentially only for those who already own capital.

Class Struggle not National Struggle

Now that the South African capitalist class has started to reform South African capitalism it cannot turn back. They clearly hope that their acceptance of the black capitalists as class brothers and sisters will also buy off the black working class, stabilise the situation and encourage foreign capital to return to the country. There is some justification for this optimism. Up to now the ANC has been largely successful in channelling the struggle against capitalism into black nationalism. Mandela has not been praised and feted by the international capitalist press for nothing. But it will not be so easy for the ANC to preserve this myth once it becomes clear that little will change for the workers. Of course there will be radical splinters from the ANC which will continue to represent black nationalism as black class interests. South African workers will have to resist this and recognise that there only hope of a better future lies as one of the battalions in the international class army which confronts capitalism everywhere.

"Recession"

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The latter, however, are experiencing slowdowns in growth. The Nomura Research Institute is predicting a 9 per cent fall in Japanese corporate profits this year and warning of the danger of a collapse in capital investment.)

For a system which depends on accumulation for its very existence such a situation spells disaster. Despite the increasing threat of bankruptcy, somehow or other capital has to try and find a means of returning to profitability. In the UK this has meant that an increasing number of firms have been obliged to turn to borrowing from banks and the "money markets". By the end of last year they owed £24 billion in interest repayments alone.

We have spent enough column inches over the last decade or so explaining how the government's policies of giving "free rein" to the market and using high interest rates to attract speculative finance capital from abroad have left British industrial capitalism in a worse position than ever to face its competitors. The Thatcher "boom", the economic commentators now freely admit, was little more than the consequences of a buy now, pay later spending spree which was made possible by a massive expansion of credit. To a large extent the debts the state became saddled with in the Seventies have been replaced by indebtedness to the banks - and not just at the level of individual consumers. It is the mounting burden of commercial and industrial insolvencies which is weighing most heavily on the banks. It is impossible to write off £3.8 billion of debt repayments (as the British banks have just done) without it having some effect. Not surprisingly, jobs at the four big banks have been amongst the first to come under the axe this time around. Lloyds Bank, which has cut 5,000 jobs over the past 15 months and which experienced a two-fifths drop in profits last year, has produced a survey predicting that 50,000 jobs will have to go in the financial services sector. Clearly a crisis of such proportions is not simply a consequence of Mr and Mrs Average cutting down on their credit card spending in the face of higher mortgages and generally rising prices. (Although this has helped to put an end to the "consumer boom".) The big four British banks, which all had their fingers burned in the Eighties when the burden of debt repayments became too much for many of the capitalism's weaker states and some of the world's biggest banks collapsed, are now feeling the effects of the deepening crisis from a source closer

to home. As one commentator put it, "Last year's surge in company insolvencies has left the banks nursing enormous bad debts." (Roger Cowe in the *Guardian*, 26.2.91) The crisis in the banking sector is a reflection of a much wider crisis of industry as a whole. It is a crisis which has been exacerbated by the government's high interest rate policy but again, we must stress, declining growth is not just a problem of British capitalism and cannot be explained simply in terms of "mismanagement" by the government. There is hardly a firm that has been unaffected by declining profits and the need to trim production costs. Redundancies are the order of the day. For workers at British Aerospace, Rolls Royce, British Airways, British Rail, GEC, BT, BP, British Steel and countless more, the "recession" is hardly a new discovery. Here the two fronts meet head-on and the working class, which does the work, produces the wealth, is told to accept job losses and wage cuts: to sacrifice their interests for the interests of capital. Now that the economic crisis has hit new depths - after 6 months of "negative growth" we are officially informed there is a "recession". It's like being told there were tens of thousands of Iraqi deaths after the ceasefire. While the "Allies" were carrying out their bombardments death apparently didn't happen. So, in the attacks on the working class at home "recession" (but not economic crisis) is admitted when it can no longer be denied.

"Recession" is a useful word for the ruling class. It implies a temporary set-back with the prospect of an up-turn round the corner. It helps promote the idea of pulling together to get out of difficulties, denying the existence of a conflict of interest between workers and bosses and instead encourages the working class to consider the interests of the "country" (that is, of capital). At the same time the prospect of unemployment reinforces the belief that there is no point in workers struggling because the firm will only go bust anyway. "Be thankful for what you've got or you may end up with nothing." In short, it is part of the bosses' propaganda arsenal which aims to disarm the working class by pointing out the odds are hopeless.

Like all the most successful propaganda there is an element of truth in this. So long as workers believe in the long-term health of the system, or at least see no alternative to it, and so long as their struggle remains divided and limited in the arena of trade unionism the way forward will remain obscure. The present party is

amongst the working class - with the number of days lost through strikes currently lower than at any point since the Thirties - is not simply a result of the decimation of the traditional strongholds of the industrial working class during the past decade. It is an acknowledgement that the struggle of the Seventies and Eighties, hard-fought though they often were, were also defeated. They not only failed to temporarily stop the bosses imposing their own solutions to the crisis of profitability (the only kind of material victory possible for the working class when capitalism is in crisis) but organisationally and politically they led workers into a cul-de-sac.

So is there no alternative? In the face of overwhelming odds is not the only course open to the working class to quit the battle and accept what capital has in store? Accept that millions have to be without the means of earning a living. Ignore the homeless and the cardboard cities. Work harder and tighten the belt. Forget about the rest of humanity and get on with the Do-It-Yourself. Let the bosses find their own way out of the crisis and wait for the recession itself to recede. Thinking like this only emphasises that the crisis has some way to go in capital's heartlands before material circumstances will force the mass of the working class to seek a different alternative. One thing is certain though: waiting for the bosses' long-term solution to the crisis is waiting for Armageddon.

WAR: THE BOSSES' SOLUTION TO THE CRISIS

The Gulf War and its horrendous aftermath are a clear warning of where the bosses' way out of the economic crisis ultimately leads. Marxists have been arguing for years that the two world wars this century were no accident of history but part of world capitalism's inexorable accumulation cycle of Crisis - War - Reconstruction. The post-war period of relatively high economic growth and more or less "full" employment in capital's imperialist metropolises was made possible by the devastation and devaluation of capital during the Second World War. This period was well and truly over by the Seventies. Ever since world capital has been struggling in a downward spiral of "upturn" and "recession" to maintain profit levels. It is a sign of the depth of this crisis that it has taken the destruction of Kuwait and Iraq, not to mention the loss of 100,000 lives, as a means of helping the US to move out of the present "recession". British capital, hanging onto America's coat tail, is also set to benefit. This is no fantasy or exaggeration on our part. Already on January 15th, the day the bombing finally started, the *Financial Times* was speculating:

A war with Iraq, conversely, could boost construction orders as spending on defence increases. Other Middle East states, fearful of unrest within their own borders, might step up investment on new infrastructure - particularly if oil price rises substantially increase their spending power.

And pointed out that,

Several large construction groups which were highly successful in the Middle East when this market was at its zenith in the late 1970s are now preparing in case there is a resurgence of construction demand in the region.

US and UK construction companies, like capitalist industries in general have become more reliant on investment abroad. However, while Eastern Europe and the Third World "also need investment in infrastructure and new industries" the *Financial Times* informs us "these nations have no money to pay for it." Not so the oil-rich states of the Gulf whose Emirates and "Royal families" are still living in splendid luxury on the basis of their petro-dollars. (Even though they might be in exile the Kuwaiti al Sabah family still had control of the billions of dollars lodged in Western banks.) Thus in the immediate aftermath of war, while other European powers look cynically on, the US

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The Tragedy of Kronstadt 1921

Lessons of a Workers Revolt in Lenin's Russia



Bolshevik poster, 1919: Baltic fleet, vanguard of the revolution

March 1991 marks the seventieth anniversary of the Kronstadt Uprising. In that month sailors at the Kronstadt naval base, near Petrograd rose in revolt. They were responding to the strikes by workers in Petrograd which had been militarily suppressed by the Bolsheviks. Seventy years later it is easier to be wise about the mistakes made on both sides. But the Kronstadt tragedy offers lessons which future revolutions will ignore at their peril.

Today the facts of Kronstadt are still a matter of dispute. Anarchists have usually exaggerated the number of those who were killed in Kronstadt whilst Trotskyists and Stalinists have always tried to hide what the programme of the revolt was. Our purpose is not to try to explain away Kronstadt nor to praise it. We aim to understand what lessons we must draw from the tragedy.

One of the myths of Kronstadt is that the island naval base had always been a stronghold of the Bolshevik Party. This was not true. The fact is that no tendency ever had a predominance in Kronstadt. Bolsheviks and Anarchists generally took second and third places to members of the Maximalist faction of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (See I Getzler *Kronstadt 1917-21: The fate of a Soviet Democracy*). In July 1917 it was the anarchists and SR-Maximalists who had launched the armed demonstration against the Provisional Government against Bolshevik advice. It is also not true as the Trotskyists maintain that the class composition of the Kronstadters had altered between 1917 and 1921. Most of the sailors had been of peasant origin in 1917 and were so in 1921.

The Kronstadt rebels on board the battleship Petropavlovsk adopted a resolution which

quickly became the manifesto of the revolt. To counter the usual misrepresentations of their demands we have printed it in full (see side panel). It did not call for "soviets without communists" as the Trotskyist liars like Harman and Cliff maintain (see *Russia - from Workers State to State Capitalism* p.20). It did call for "Immediate new elections to the Soviets ... freedom of speech for the anarchists and for the Left Socialist Parties ... equalisation of rations ... The granting to the peasants of freedom of action ... provided they do not employ hired labour".

They did not demand, as Trotsky said later, "free trade" or "special privileges themselves". Indeed though Lenin and Trotsky themselves lived like workers the Bolshevik representatives in Kronstadt like Raskolnikov and Larissa Reisner seem to have antagonised the Kronstadters in flaunting their own privi-

leges. It should also be noted that this programme was accepted not only by the whole of the Baltic Fleet but also by many Bolsheviks in Kronstadt.

Attempts at negotiations did not succeed. Both sides imprisoned each others' negotiators. Lenin and Trotsky seem to have genuinely believed that the whole episode was a "White plot". The White generals who had been backed by all the imperialist powers had only been defeated a few weeks before, after three years of a bloody and exhausting civil war. Also Trotsky had built up the Red Army using ex-Tsarist officers. One of these, General Kozlovsky was in charge of the artillery at Kronstadt and should have taken over the command of its fortress once the Bolshevik commander had fled. He refused (it is said he refused to recognise the Revolutionary Committee in Kronstadt) but remained as a technical expert. However this was all that the Party propaganda machine needed to be able to spread the rumour that Kronstadt was a White plot. The workers in Petrograd abandoned their support for the revolt. The use of the press like this was a complete shock to Victor Serge, the ex-anarchist then working for the Communist International:

... the Press ... was positively berserk with lies. And this was our own Press, the Press of our revolution, the first Socialist Press, and hence the first incorruptible and unbiased Press in the world! ... The Kronstadt insurrection had shed not a single drop of blood, and merely arrested a few Communist officials, who were treated absolutely correctly ... all the same the legend of narrowly averted executions was put around.

(Memoirs of a Revolutionary)

The Suppression of the Revolt

The first assault on the base on March 8th across the ice of the Gulf of Finland was a failure. Many of the troops deserted to the Kronstadters. A new force was hurriedly assembled made up of Cheka units, Red Army officer-cadets, *Komsomol*, and even 300 or more delegates who were then assembling for the Tenth Party Congress in Petrograd. The Bolsheviks were in a hurry because the ice was expected to melt in the next few days. This would not only make attack more difficult but could have made it possible for capitalist governments and White exiles to send reinforcements. On March 16th Tukhachevsky launched the second attack and by 18th March the entire town had been re-occupied. There are few reliable figures of casualties but the anarchist writer, Paul Avrich (in his *Kronstadt 1921*) estimates that 10,000 of the attacking force died under the Kronstadt guns (including 15 Bolshevik delegates) whilst

1,500 of the defenders were killed and a further 2,500 were captured. Many of these were later shot by the Cheka.

The Background to Kronstadt

Victor Serge, one of the most honest eyewitnesses to the events of the Russian Revolution finally came down on the side of the Bolsheviks (see box) but he also highlighted the significance of the event:

The problem is in truth much vaster than the event of Kronstadt which was only an episode.

Kronstadt cannot be isolated from the developments in the Russian economy, in the Soviet state and, above all in the international revolutionary situation.

How was it that the Bolsheviks, the clearest expression of the world working class from 1914, the leading party to call for turning the "imperialist war into a civil war", could have been brought to kill the very workers that it had led to power? The answer to this cannot be given fully in the space we have here but the fundamental reason was isolation of the Russian working class. From the very moment of his arrival back in Russia Lenin had called for socialist revolution but only as part of an international revolutionary wave. He believed, and not without reason, that the imperialist war had brought the Western European proletariat to the verge of revolution. The Russian proletariat might be leading the way but it could not hang on unless the European proletariat defeated imperialism in its main power centres. "If the peoples of Europe do not arise and crush imperialism we shall be crushed - that is beyond doubt". This was a sentiment he expressed continuously between 1918 and 1922. However by March 1921 the revolutions in Central Europe, in Berlin, Bavaria, Hungary and Vienna had all come to naught or been crushed. Red Clydeside and the factory occupations in Turin had remained localised. At the same time the Russian working class was faced with a life and death struggle with the armies of imperialism from 14 countries until December 1920. Although the Bolsheviks and the working class performed miracles to bring about this victory the price was as if they had lost.

The civil war had devastated the country. During the war the Bolsheviks had been forced increasingly to take emergency measures. This included forced grain requisitioning from the peasants as a way to feed the cities and an army of 5 millions. Peasants, who had been given their lands by the Bolsheviks refused to cooperate with the Government. As a result by 1920 only 60% of the 1913 area was being farmed. Total production was less than half of 1913. Famine stalked the land. Worst of all was the situation in the cities. This is Serge's description of Petrograd in early 1921.

Winter was a torture (there is no other word for it) for the townspeople: no heating, no lighting, and the ravages of famine. Children and feeble old folk died in their thousands. Typhus was carried everywhere by lice and took its frightful toll ... People dined on a pittance of oatmeal or half-rotten horsemeat, a lump of sugar would be divided into tiny fragments among a family.

In such conditions it was not surprising that there were 118 different peasant revolts in February 1921 including one at Tambov where Antonov led an army of 50,000 against the Bolsheviks. Perhaps more surprising, at least at first sight, was an outbreak of working class anger. The fact that it led to demands for fresh elections to the Soviets was due to the decline of those bodies in the civil war. After the October Revolution more soviets sprang up throughout Russia than ever before. In 1918

The Petropavlovsk resolution which became the manifesto of the Kronstadt Revolt

Having heard the report of the representatives of the crews sent by the general meeting of ships' crews to Petrograd to investigate the state of affairs there, we demand:

1. that in view of the fact that the present Soviets do not express the will of the workers and peasants, new elections by secret ballot be held immediately, with free preliminary propaganda for all workers and peasant before elections;
2. freedom of speech and press for workers and peasants, anarchists and left socialist parties;
3. freedom of assembly for trade unions and peasant associations;
4. that a non-party conference of workers, Red Army soldiers and sailors of Petrograd, Kronstadt and Petrograd Province be convened not later than the 10th March 1921;
5. the liberation of all political prisoners of socialist parties, as well as all workers and peasants, Red Army soldiers and sailors imprisoned in connection with the working class and peasant movements;
6. the election of a commission to review the cases of those who are held in jails and concentration camps;
7. the abolition of all political departments because no single party should have special privileges in the propaganda of its ideas and receive funds from the state for this purpose; instead of these departments, locally elected cultural commissions should be established, to be financed by the state;
8. that all roadblock detachments (to prevent food smuggling) be removed immediately;
9. the equalisation of the rations of all toilers, with the exception of those working in trades injurious to health;
10. the abolition of the Communist fighting detachments in all military units, as well as various Communist guards kept on duty in factories and plants; should such guards or detachments be needed they could be chosen from the companies in the military units, and at the discretion of the workers in factories and plants;
11. that the peasants be given the right and freedom of action to do as they please with all the land and also the right to have cattle which they themselves must maintain and manage, that is without the use of hired labour;
12. we request all military units, as well as the military cadet comrades to endorse our resolution;
13. we demand that all our resolutions be widely published in the press;
14. we demand the appointment of a travelling bureau for control;
15. we demand that free handicraft production by one's own labour be permitted.

the Soviets had been the scenes of lively debate - a testimony to the vitality of working class political life in Russia. Soviet Congresses met every three months in the "heroic period" of the revolution before July 1918. After this time they became annual. Lenin confessed in 1919 that "*the Soviets, which by virtue of their programme are organs of government by the working people are in fact organs of government for the working people by an advanced section of the proletariat, but not by the working people as a whole.*"

By 1921 the Soviets played no role in the formulation of policy. They did not even ratify the decisions of Sovnarkom (the Council of Peoples Commissars). Ironically many local soviets were beginning to re-appear with the end of the civil war and elections were becoming freer (the Mensheviks were again tolerated) on the very eve of Kronstadt. However anarchist and councilists, preferring myth to fact have argued that the decline of the soviets was all part of the Bolshevik programme since the Bolsheviks did not really believe in "soviet power".

The Myths

There is no coherent Anarchist view of Kronstadt. Some like Ida Mett in her famous pamphlet have eulogised Kronstadt as "the Third Revolution", the pure spirit of revolutionary Russia trying to wipe out the Bolshevik perversion. Others, like Nicholas Walter admit that Kronstadt was **not** dominated by the anarchists (See *Anarchy* 2 1971) whilst the lunatic fringe, led by Voline have denounced the Kronstadters as "authoritarian" because they supported the idea of Soviet "power"!

The disappearing breed of councilists (i.e. those who think that workers' councils **alone** are a sufficient condition for the success of proletarian revolution) always used to use Kronstadt as part of their argument that all political parties, but especially the Bolsheviks, are inherently evil and bourgeois. For them it was the **ideas** of the Bolsheviks which caused the counter-revolution. This is itself a bourgeois theory - idealism. It actually accepts the basic capitalist view that "a small group of armed men" pretending to represent the workers' interests fooled the Russian working class. The Russian workers then brought this party to power because it hypocritically supported the programme of soviet power. Once in power it then set up a party dictatorship which forced the Russian working class into passivity.

This turns reality on its head. The Bolsheviks were the only party to support Soviet power unequivocally. True Lenin did rail against the Soviets in July when they supported the massacre of Bolshevik workers. But any systematic analysis of Bolshevik pronouncements cannot doubt that they believed that only the working class as a whole could build socialism. We could quote literally a score of passages from Lenin after October 1917 (when presumably the mask should have come off) to the following effect:

...socialism cannot be implemented by a minority, by the Party. It can be implemented only by tens of millions when they have learned to do it for themselves"

or;

.... socialism cannot be decreed from above. Its spirit rejects the mechanical bureaucratic approach; living socialism is the product of the masses themselves.

This is not to deny that the Bolsheviks did not become the **unwitting** agents of the counter-revolution. As Marx observed "Men make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing". The Bolsheviks were well aware of the degeneration of the revolution. Again we could quote at length but a single illustration is all we have space for.

... and if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can be truthfully said that the Communists are directing the heap. To tell the truth they are not directing, they are being directed.

That "huge bureaucratic heap" had risen from just over 100,000 in 1918 to nearly 6 million by 1920. Mostly the Communist Party as Lenin knew was full of careerists. Only 2% of the Party's 600,000 members had joined before 1917. But if the Party was now being corrupted, the proletariat as Lenin was to announce in October 1921 "had disappeared". This was mainly the result of the civil war and famine. The most class conscious died fighting in the Red Army, others drifted back to the

Socialist Revolutionaries, to power very quickly. They had fought alongside the Whites in some cases (and had been rewarded by being shot for the privilege). The Communists would have faced physical liquidation. In short the introduction of the Kronstadt programme would only have speeded up the counter-revolutionary process.

Equally wrong is the Trotsky view that Kronstadt was a petty bourgeois rising. This what he wrote in his Mexican exile in 1938.

If we don't want to deceive ourselves with pretentious slogans, with false labels ... we must realise that the Kronstadt uprising was nothing but the armed reaction of the petty bourgeoisie to the harshness of the social revolution and to the severity of the proletarian dictatorship ... The insurgents hadn't a conscious programme and couldn't have had one by the very nature of their petty bourgeois origin.

This, as we have already demonstrated was not true but it became the basis for the standard Stalinist and Trotskyist distortions of the event (see the Cliff and Harman book quoted above, as well as C. Bettelheim *Class Struggles in the USSR 1917-23* and P. Frank's introduction to *Kronstadt*, an edition of Lenin and Trotsky's writings by the Fourth International).

The Lessons of Kronstadt

Victor Serge on why he fought for the Bolsheviks

After many hesitations, and with unutterable anguish, my Communist friends and I finally declared ourselves on the side of the Party. This is why. Kronstadt had right on its side. Kronstadt was the beginning of a fresh, liberating revolution for popular democracy; 'The Third Revolution!' it was called by certain anarchists whose heads were stuffed with infantile illusions. However the country was absolutely exhausted, and production practically at a standstill; there were no reserves of any kind, not even stamina in the hearts of the masses. The working class elite that had been moulded in the struggle against the old regime was literally decimated. The Party, swollen by the influx of power seekers, inspired little confidence. Of the parties only minute nuclei existed, whose character was highly questionable ...

If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it was only a short step to chaos, and through chaos to a peasant rising, the massacre of the Communists, the return of the emigres, and, in the end, through sheer force of events, another dictatorship, this time anti-proletarian."

V. Serge: *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*

countryside which they had left only a generation earlier. The evidence for this is that total industrial production fell to 20% of the 1913 level and Petrograd lost about two-thirds of its population. A proletarian revolution cannot be made without a proletariat.

The Programme of the Counter-revolution

Kronstadt represented an attempt to arrest the growing development of a counter-revolution in Russia. The fact remains that the Kronstadt programme would also have meant the victory of the counter-revolution. It is no accident that the New Economic Policy (NEP) of the Bolsheviks, drafted in late 1920 by Lenin (i.e. before Kronstadt) and the Kronstadt programme should both demand the same concessions to the peasantry and to a free market in grain. The difference is that Lenin knew that it was a "a step backwards". Most of the Kronstadters did not. The Russian proletariat, isolated as it was, had no alternative but to make concessions to the peasant majority. And what did NEP represent? In these days when Gorbachev is spouting quotations from the Lenin of the NEP period we must clearly state that NEP was nothing to do with socialism. Lenin hoped that this "retreat to state capitalism" would be just holding operation. But this optimism was doomed. NEP represented nothing less than obliteration of the gains that had been made by the Russian working class in October 1917. With hindsight we can see that it was the first step on the road to the counter-revolutionary victory of state capitalism in Russia. What the Kronstadt programme would have done would have been to bring the peasant party, the

Rosa Luxemburg once remarked that revolutions don't allow anyone to play schoolteachers with them. It is also true that the lessons of each revolutionary episode are never simple enough to be learned by rote. Everything depends on the context in which the episode took place. What then was the significance of the Kronstadt revolt?

As we wrote five years ago:

Kronstadt was a popular insurrection, strongly marked by a genuine revolutionary mood but containing some dangerous elements. The revolt initiated a systematic repression and authoritarian policy, at both the political and economic level, which daily undermined the revolutionary conquests of Red October ... This degenerative process could not avoid hitting the Communist Party itself, making it unable to prevent a historic course which was already dramatically defined (by the isolation of Russia, the failure of the revolution to expand internationally). Nonetheless the Bolsheviks' policy contained serious errors which ... accelerated the process ... Kronstadt is both the response to the degeneration and at the same time the product of it.

From Kronstadt 1921 (written by a comrade of Battaglia Comunista in 1981 and published by us in Revolutionary Perspectives 23 in 1986)

The first point is that the communist revolution can only be made on a world scale. Wherever it breaks out the important point is that international capitalism must be paralysed in a short time. Without the resistance of workers in countries which have military and economic preponderance any revolution, anywhere, will sooner or later, be doomed. There are no plans that can be made in advance which do not take this fact into account.

Second the party must remain revolutionary and internationalist. This means that the party as a body (whatever role its individual members play) must not take control of the state. The latter must remain a battleground of the class struggle in which they party intervenes (and through its membership in these bodies aspires to win over). The party must at all times maintain the programmatic coherence of the proletariat even if this at times comes into conflict with the demands of the individual proletarian state for a temporary period. This separation was made quite explicit in the Platform of the **Internationalist Communist Party**, the only authentic heirs of the Italian Left which fought the degeneration of the revolution on an international level. They wrote in 1982;

The state of the proletarian dictatorship, stemming from a successful revolutionary movement is an achievement of the international proletariat ... Only the workers' state, maintained on the path of revolution by the Party cadres, who must never confuse themselves with the state nor merge with it, will be able to systematically take all the necessary measures in the social economy by which the capitalist system will be replaced by the socialist administration of production and distribution ... At no time and for no reason does the proletariat abandon its combative role. It does not delegate to others its historical mission, and it does not delegate its power away by proxy, even to its political party.

Naturally if the retreats of the proletarian state are more than temporary, if capital once again triumphs then there are no legislative safeguards that can be followed. All that communists can do is to fight that degeneration from outside the state. After Kronstadt that it what the Bolsheviks failed to do.

They became themselves the agents of the counter-revolution and with the victory of "socialism in one country" masquerading as communism we have had almost 70 years in which the bourgeoisie has been able to use the equation "Stalinist dictatorship = proletarian dictatorship" as a propaganda weapon against the very idea of communism. The collapse of Stalinism hasn't made the ideological struggle any easier in the short term. It does however open up a new chapter of work of theoretical preparation and propaganda for internationalist communists everywhere.

JD

More about Kronstadt

For more about our views on Kronstadt and its relevance today, and on the period of transition, see *Revolutionary Perspectives* 23, available from the group address for £1.50, including postage and packing.

More about the CWO

For more on our view generally, beyond what is contained in "OUR BASIC POSITIONS" on page 7, please send a stamped addressed envelope to our box.

The War Behind the War

continued from front page

sacrifices, and the first in line would have been its massive military machine. Iraq was the classically "dangerous" country: one with a huge army it could not maintain.

However, before using its military option, Iraq attempted to force up the price of oil. It had allies in this.

The US

As a not inconsiderable producer, although not an exporter, of oil itself, the US is vitally interested in the price of this commodity. A higher price might mean industrial production would fall (but this would be a marginal and temporary effect anyway: oil producers invest their profits like all capitalists - they don't bury them in the sand but in financial institutions and thus, indirectly, in the production of value) but this price would hurt America's competitors more than America itself. The competitive advantage thus gained would more than offset any loss. In addition, at a higher price, many of the US's old oil fields would recover their profitability and be able to resume production (and some of them actually did after last August). In short, a higher oil price might lower the whole playing field, but it would also give it a slope in the US's favour.

Although a higher price of oil is in the interest of the US economy as a whole, it is scarcely in the interest of the majority of the US population: neither of that part of the working class that has not yet been pushed into the ever widening margins of US society and still owns cars, nor of the smaller capitalists, many of whom are on the verge of bankruptcy. But policy, even more than elections, is decided on the basis of one dollar, one vote. At the same time, prices that are raised due to the actions of "some foreigner" are much easier to make acceptable to the victims.

Not only has a higher price of oil been US policy but it acted to realise this policy on more than one occasion. This is not speculation. It was the US that precipitated the present and continuing global crisis of capitalist production by devaluing the dollar in 1971. This had the effect of lowering the value of assets of US competitors like Japan and also caused a reduction in the real price of oil (which had remained fairly static since World War Two). The oil producing countries then formed OPEC as a cartel to raise prices. It is the only "successful" cartel of primary producing countries in history. The reason for this is that the US backed it. Higher oil prices hit Japan and Europe far more than the US. Again, in 1986 the famous Sheikh Yamani, who at the time favoured low oil prices, was sacked after Saudi Arabia had agreed to the US's demands to stick to OPEC quotas, reducing production and thus pushing up prices. Although prices did rise from \$8 a barrel, they had fallen back to \$16, compared with the US target of \$25, by July this year.

At this point, US and Iraqi interests coincided. A revealing source is the series of transcripts of discussions between Saddam Hussein and US diplomats (quoted in February's *South*). These transcripts were released by Saddam and not denied by the US. Firstly, it emerges that the US both supported and inspired the Iraqi demand for \$25 per barrel. Secondly, the celebrated remarks by April Glaspie, the US ambassador (and scapegoat!) that "...your" [i.e., Saddam's] "aims should receive support from your brother Arabs." "...We don't have an opinion on inter-Arab disputes...and James Baker has directed our official spokesman to reiterate this stand.", show that the US did not quarrel with Iraq's methods, as it perceived them.

But it appears that either Saddam double-crossed the US or that the US misunderstood his intentions. Instead of just seizing the territory Iraq has most pressingly claimed from Kuwait, the Rumailia oilfields, it

took the whole "country".

This cut across the US's purposes in two ways: firstly, the US is not simply interested in the price of oil, it is also increasingly interested in controlling the supply.² Iraq's control of Kuwait put it in command of a large chunk of the world's reserves and put it in a better position to militarily pursue its border disputes with Saudi Arabia. If it had won the Saudi territory it claimed, it would have had 40% of the world's oil reserves in its grasp.

Secondly, the Kuwaiti fields contain some of the world's most easily extracted oil. If your oil has a low cost of production (because it is easily extracted), your interests lie in increasing the volume of production even if this reduces the sale price (especially if this sale price falls below your rivals cost of production). An Iraq holding Kuwait would be in precisely this position. It would then have a material interest in a higher volume of sales resulting in lower oil prices, in opposition to the US's interests.

In addition, factors not directly connected to oil made this a bad time to quarrel with the US. There are powerful echoes between its position and Iraq's. The US too is a power whose military might is becoming disproportionate to the economy supporting it. It had, and has, a need to tell the world that opposing its interests is dangerous, and, as its capacity to inflict economic punishment on anyone transgressing the holy law of American interest diminishes, the more it will use its military. This is why it ignored all the Iraqi, Russian and Iranian proposals for a disguised Iraqi surrender between the turn of the year and the commencement of the ground war. Once its forces were in place in Saudi Arabia its war aims were for bigger stakes.

The Coalition...

It was no accident that only Britain of all the OECD countries wholeheartedly supported the US. What goes for the US also goes for it, both with regard to deflecting the crisis onto its competitors through the price of oil and to sabre-rattling. But in this enterprise it was very much a junior partner.

The various Arab partners in the coalition were worried about three things to varying degrees: too much oil falling into Iraqi hands, their own territory being seized or their ruling regimes overthrown and Iraq becoming the dominant Arab power.

Turkey has claims on northern Iraq down to Mosul dating back to the end of World War One and hoped that it could advance these. But it has equally "valid" (or invalid - the abstract reasoning of bourgeois international law follows only the logic of hypocrisy: it is more about providing "moral" cover for *Realpolitik* than anything else) claims against Iran. Hence the insistence from the latter on the "need to recognise the territorial integrity of Iraq" as well as the deafening silence from Turkey on this topic.

...and its Unwilling Fan Club

Germany and Japan, and especially the latter, are the powers whose economies have been growing in importance as the US's declines. They have also shown some reluctance as supporters of the Coalition - Germany sending the most marginal of military contributions to Turkey (in case Saddam really was a second Hitler and wanted to emulate the master in going down in a blaze of ignominy in a war on two fronts?) and Japan nothing at all, and haggling over the amount of financial assistance. The reason for this is clear: they were being pulled two ways by the events. On the one hand, they require cheap and reliable oil supplies in order to keep up the pace with which they are challenging the US in the economic sphere, and the Coalition's action was aimed at ensuring the reliability of supply. The Japanese will find that its apparent cheapness will only add to the chorus of demands for aid to pay for the war. On the other, they have no interest whatsoever in assisting the US in shorting up its claim to world domination by using military force. On the contrary, they are the powers which will need to break out of Bush's New World Order. Capitalism has to "expand or die". Japanese capitalism cannot accept the restrictions which the US is trying to impose on it. In short, Japan has imperialist ambitions of its own.

The Balance Sheet

There is little doubt that the USA was initially caught out by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. It was not a deep-laid plot to trap an Iraqi regime which they had been supporting for nine years, along with all its atrocities. Two years ago, for example, there was no flicker of reaction by the US to the gassing of Kurds.

On the Iraqi side, we can see the limitations of any regional power trying to challenge the existing impe-

rialist order. Without the economic power and the basic infrastructure no country, however large its army, can overthrow the existing imperialist order. This is also something that is clear to the US. By February Dick Cheney, the US Defence Secretary was stating what the stakes were:

By winning the war as quickly as possible America will appear stronger in the eyes of the whole world. It will prove that she has the resources to install a new world order. (From LA Tribune, 5.2.91)

Just what those "resources" were was underlined by the James Baker, the US Secretary of State:

"I don't believe that US leadership should be linked only to the domain of politics and security. I think that this leadership must also extend to the economic domain."

And on the surface the US appears to have been successful. First, it now has control, direct or indirect, of the major part of the world's oil supply. The oil monarchies of the Gulf had been showing a growing tendency to want to manage surplus oil revenues themselves. Now, with US troops likely to be in the Gulf for years, they are finally in the US pocket and will have to accept Baker's plans for a Middle East development fund giving the US direct access to oil revenues.

Second, the US is actually passing the costs of the economic crisis onto its rivals in Europe and Japan. Not only is it set to make a profit from the adventure (if the promises made by the governments of Germany, Japan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are kept), but the US military have a monopoly of the contracts for rebuilding Kuwait. (A few British firms like Taylor Woodrow will get a look in. No-one else need apply!)

Third, the US will now be able to bang the table more vigorously at the revived, but slowed-down, Uruguay round of the GATT talks. We have been arguing since 1982 that the retreat of the USSR has meant that Pax Americana is the order of the day. The 'New World Order' is not an assertion of a better world but, as this barbaric war illustrates, the naked reality of US imperialist domination.

But this is an unstable order. The US has been forced to resort to more and more military adventures to assert its authority over a world which it once dominated economically. With a massive debt burden of its own and other capitalist powers facing the urgent necessity to defend their own patch from the world capitalist crisis, there is little room for cosy get-togethers. This means that, as we predicted at the beginning of 1989, the world is now "a more dangerous place".

Notes

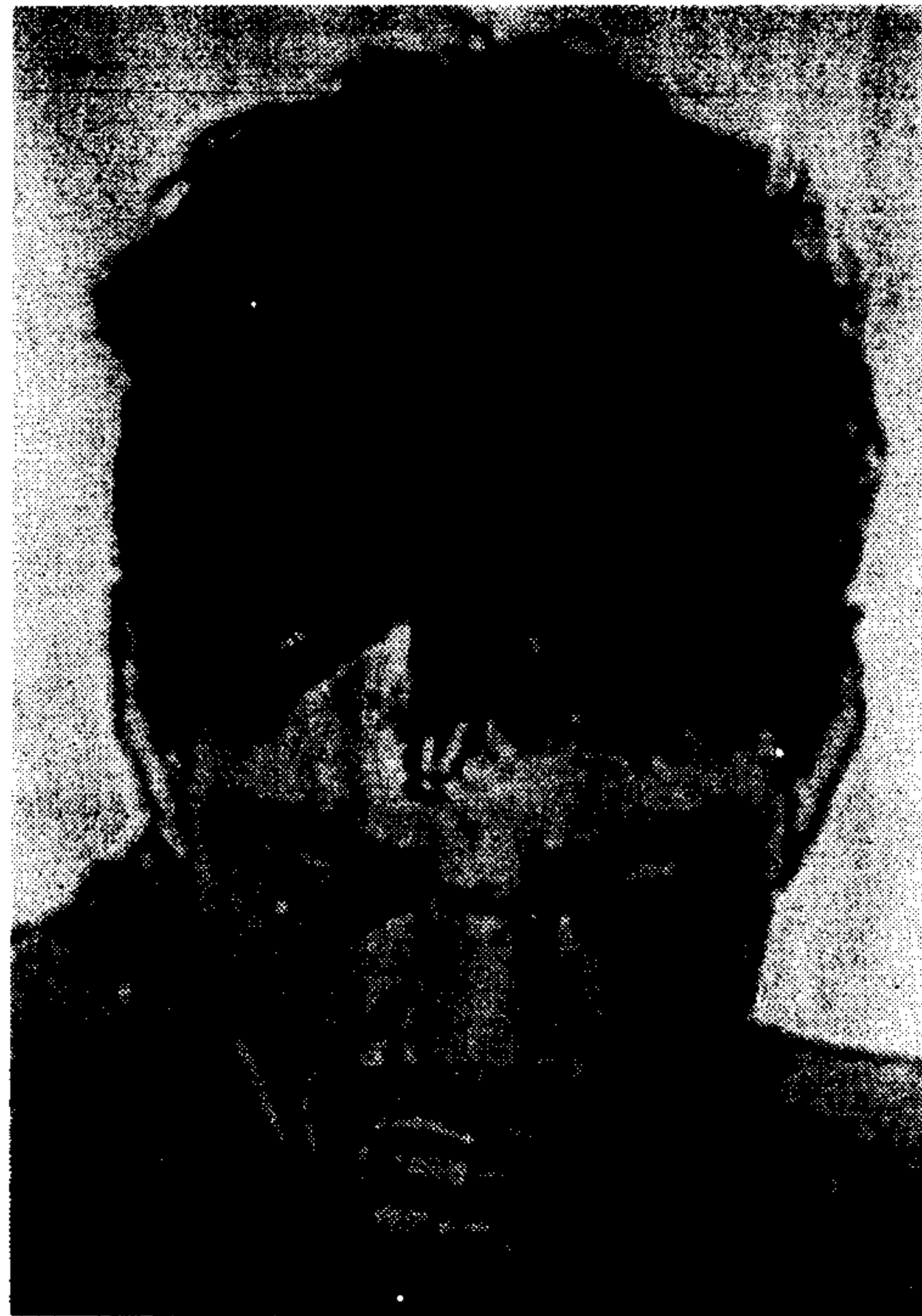
1 Glaspie backs this up: in an interview with the New York Times she says: "Obviously" (!) "I didn't think, and no-one else did, that Iraq would take all of Kuwait." i.e. Saddam had a US green light to take some!

2 The US can actually gain relatively with both higher and lower oil prices, depending on the specific circumstances prevailing at the time. In 1970 the US depended on foreign sources for only 12% of its oil. By 1987 this had risen to 36% and it was therefore more vulnerable to price changes. On the other hand, the foreign sources include Mexico which has recently conceded a stake in its state-run oil industry to the United States, in return for the writing-off of some of its more pressing debts to US banks. Our initial view that the US wanted lower prices last August was based on the fact that it had supported Kuwait in its attempts to make Iraq repay its loans (run up during its war against Iran) and thus weaken Saddam's efforts to further strengthen his army. The release of the documents referred to here show that the US was playing for higher stakes. As in 1971-3, it saw the oil price as a means of disciplining its increasingly difficult allies in Europe and of weakening Japan on the economic front. The evolution of the Gulf 'crisis' into war cannot (as we showed in *Workers' Voice* 55) cannot be divorced from the breakdown of the GATT talks last December due to US intransigency and hypocrisy over subsidies. Now the US itself is not sure what it wants. As the *Guardian* reported (12.2.91), "The Bush Administration's new energy policy ... implies a price high enough to stimulate domestic oil exploration and production without hitting other powerful industrial sectors like the automotive sector". According to Robert Mabro, Director of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, "Washington has to decide whether it wants a high price or a low price where 'the boundaries of the game' are an upper price of \$28 and a low of \$15 since anything below that will not be politically sustainable." The important point to remember is that for the US to be able to decide, control of the oil supply is crucial.

Atrocity Propaganda



This is not an atrocity: Retreating Iraqi soldier incinerated by Coalition Forces. ("We" did it.)



This is an atrocity: not the injuries, for those were caused by ejecting from his warplane, but the taking of the photograph! ("They" did it.)

In the Marxist tradition, the art of propaganda is the art of telling the truth in the best possible way. In this sense, the paper is pure propaganda and proud of it. But when the bourgeoisie talks about propaganda, it means that it is a tool to be used to seek. When the bourgeoisie communicates, whether it is selling washing powder or wars, it has an interest in concealing the true state of affairs (it is impossible for all washing powders to wash whiter than white, capitalism's wars are fought for the interests of one section of the capitalist class, and workers are just cannon fodder in them). It pursues this interest.

Three examples: when Iraq invaded Kuwait, a BA 'plane was trapped at Kuwaiti airport. All of the papers reported that the stewardesses had been raped. This was just a lie.

Iraqi soldiers were supposed to have killed 300 sick children, throwing premature babies out of incubators in Kuwaiti hospitals. All of the papers said this. Now the *Guardian* (3rd March 1991) tells us that hospital officials have said this didn't happen.

When Flight Lieutenant Peters was captured and shown on Iraqi television, all of the papers alleged that the Iraqis had beaten him up. On his release his wife was asked how worried she had been when she had seen him on TV. She replied that she had not been that worried, as his injuries appeared to be "typical ejection injuries". In short, the papers had all lied (or not bothered to check up on their facts when it suited their interests to be ignorant, which is the same thing).

And the reason for the media's amplification of the Iraqi's no doubt bad behaviour: to cover up and/or justify the Coalition's own atrocities: the precision bombing of shelters, the carpet bombing of Basra, the systematic incineration at al Matla of the Iraqi troops as they retreated, using "illegal" Rockeye cluster bombs (these explode into 2000 needle sharp fragments, and can scatter a human being over an acre. They are "outlawed" under international treaty, just like chemical weapons. The US has even less respect for international "law" than Saddam Hussein.), the persecution of the Palestinians by "liberated" Kuwaitis, with American backing (as admitted by Radio 4's *World at One*), etc., etc.

The Theory and Practice of Marxism

Marxism is not a dogma, nor a set of stone tablets handed down from on high. It is above all a scientific method for looking at the world from the viewpoint of the working class. As the Scottish socialist, John Maclean wrote:

... marxians do not fall back upon what Marx said here or there, but apply his principles to each set of circumstances as it arises. "Thus spake Marx" is not the marxian but the anti-marxian method.

In this new series we will attempt to explain many of the basic concepts which today's internationalist communists use by applying marxist method to present day reality.



The final distinction Lenin made was to point out that revolutionary defeatism was not mere pacifism.

"The slogan of "peace" is incorrect ... This is a philistine's, a preacher's slogan. The proletarian slogan must be civil war."

(All the above quotations taken from the same letter to Shlyapnikov op. cit. pp. 74-5)

How the civil war was to come about he spelled out in his next article. Here he did not just argue that workers can only fight the imperialist war by civil war but went on to point out that they needed weapons to do so and therefore did not refuse to fight in the army. They joined the bourgeois army in order to obtain weapons which could, at the right moment, be turned against the capitalist class.

The idea of refusing to serve in the army, of strikes against the war, etc., is mere foolishness, it is the miserable and cowardly dream of an unarmed struggle against an armed bourgeoisie, it is a weak yearning for the abolition of capitalism without a desperate civil war or a series of wars. Propaganda of class struggle even in the midst of war is the duty of a Socialist; work directed toward transforming the war of the peoples into a civil war is the only Socialist work in the epoch of an imperialist armed conflict of the bourgeoisie of all nations. Down with the sentimental and foolish preacher's yearnings for a "peace at any price!" Let us raise the banner of civil war!"

No.1: Revolutionary Defeatism

Talk of "revolutionary defeatism" in the face of imperialist war is often greeted with blank incomprehension. As the latest imperialist adventure in the Gulf has shown many self-styled socialists have not the slightest understanding of its meaning or its significance.

To understand revolutionary defeatism we must first look at its origins. In August 1914 the First World War broke out. Contrary to all its resolutions (particularly those passed at Basle and Stuttgart) the Social Democratic Parties of the Second International each rallied to the support of its own government. In Germany the largest of these parties actually voted war funds to "their" Kaiser. All kinds of excuses were found to support the war in every country but the single result was the total collapse of the workers International. Only a few voices were raised against the war and only the Social Democratic Parties of Serbia, Bulgaria and Russia actually came out against it officially. The leading advocate of the line to be followed by all socialists in the imperialist war was Lenin.

Lenin had refused to believe that the first editions of the German Social Democratic paper, Vorwarts were anything but forgeries by the German Army. When the truth sunk in he began to draft a "Resolution of a Group of Social-Democrats" (published in September 1914). Denouncing "the betrayal of socialism by a majority of the leaders of the Second International, this resolution was the first call by anyone for a new International. The first attack was on the "defencism" of those "socialists" who had supported "their own" governments. Lenin unambiguously repeated the words of the Communist Manifesto, that the "workers have no country". He concluded that

"The slogans of Social-Democracy must now be: First, an all-embracing propaganda of the Socialist revolution, to be extended also to the army and the area of military activities; emphasis to be placed on the necessity of turning the weapons, not against the

brother wage-slaves of other countries, but against the reaction of the bourgeois governments and parties in each country; recognition of the urgent necessity of organising illegal nuclei and groups in the armies of all nations to conduct such propaganda in all languages; a merciless struggle against the chauvinism and patriotism of the philistines and bourgeoisie of all countries without exception."

The Tasks of Revolutionary Social-Democracy in the European War in Collected Works Volume XVIII "The Imperialist War 1914-15" (Martin Lawrence 1930) p.63

In the weeks that followed Lenin spelled out this message (which was quickly sloganised as "Turn the Imperialist War into a Civil War") but it should be stressed a thousand times that the fundamental basis of his position was working class internationalism. He saw it as imperative to replace the "chauvinist and opportunist" Second International with a new centre for revolutionary international socialism as soon as possible. Lenin had no illusions about the monumentally difficult task facing internationalists in 1914. In a letter to the Bolsheviks' main organiser in Petrograd, Alexander Shlyapnikov, he underlined that the fight against chauvinism "might take a long time ... but the work must be conducted along the line of such a change". He went on to urge patience.

"Not the sabotaging of the war, not undertaking sporadic individual acts in this direction, but the conducting of mass propaganda (and not only among "civilians") that leads to the transformation of the war into civil war."
(op. cit p.74)

Lenin then went on to clarify three erroneous positions which were not "revolutionary defeatist".

The first of these was that revolutionary defeatism in wanting the defeat of ones "own" government was the same as saying victory to the imperialist enemy of that government. Although he recognised that for Russians the defeat rather than victory of the Russian tsar-

ist state would be the "lesser evil" he was quite unequivocal that;

We do not sabotage the war, but we struggle against chauvinism, all propaganda and agitation being directed towards international unification ... We do not want to help Kaiserism".

In other words the idea of revolutionary defeatism has no place for those who call for a victory for any side in an imperialist war. Those so-called socialists who supported the attempts by the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein to overthrow the present imperialist order in the Middle East cannot hide behind Lenin. Saddam Hussein is not an anti-imperialist but had his own imperialist ambitions in the Middle East. The working class cannot line itself up with him since it opposes ALL imperialisms. As Lenin made abundantly clear repeatedly the task of socialists in the event of imperialist war is not defence of this or that capitalist fatherland but "hastening of the overthrow of capitalism".

But this overthrow cannot be achieved at any time or under any conditions. This Lenin made clear when criticising the second error which he called "a deviation towards Anarchism". He maintained that;

It would also be erroneous ... to appeal for INDIVIDUAL acts of firing at officers ... we must prepare a mass (at least a collective) action in the army, not of one nation alone, and conduct ALL the work of propaganda and agitation in this direction. To direct the work (stubborn systematic work that may require a long time) in the spirit of transforming the national war into a civil war - this is the whole issue. The moment for such a transformation is a different question; at present it is not clear as yet."

In short Lenin recognised that no-one should make themselves a martyr. The slogan of turning weapons against the bourgeoisie was one of orientation in order to prepare the necessary level of consciousness about what needed to be done. Real revolutionary defeatism is to be found in mass propaganda everywhere against the tide of chauvinism.

"Positions and tasks of the Socialist International" op.cit. p.88

We are not quoting Lenin at length in order to take refuge in scripture but to show what his real position was. Today another imperialist war has just finished but we cannot simply apply Lenin's positions. The Gulf War was not a world war in the sense that it did not involve directly the citizens of the major participating countries from outside the Middle East. What then did revolutionary defeatism mean in the Gulf?

First it meant reasserting the basic view that "the workers have no country". The country belongs to those who own it and under capitalist property relations that means the bourgeoisie of every nation. They can keep the idea of the country! We support no existing states or their governments. We have a world to win!

Second, it meant opposition to the pacifist idea that the war was a mistake. Under capitalism war is an essential part of the cycle of accumulation. It devalues capital and raises the rate of profit. It is the ultimate attack which capitalism has after it has visited unemployment, inflation and famine on the workers.

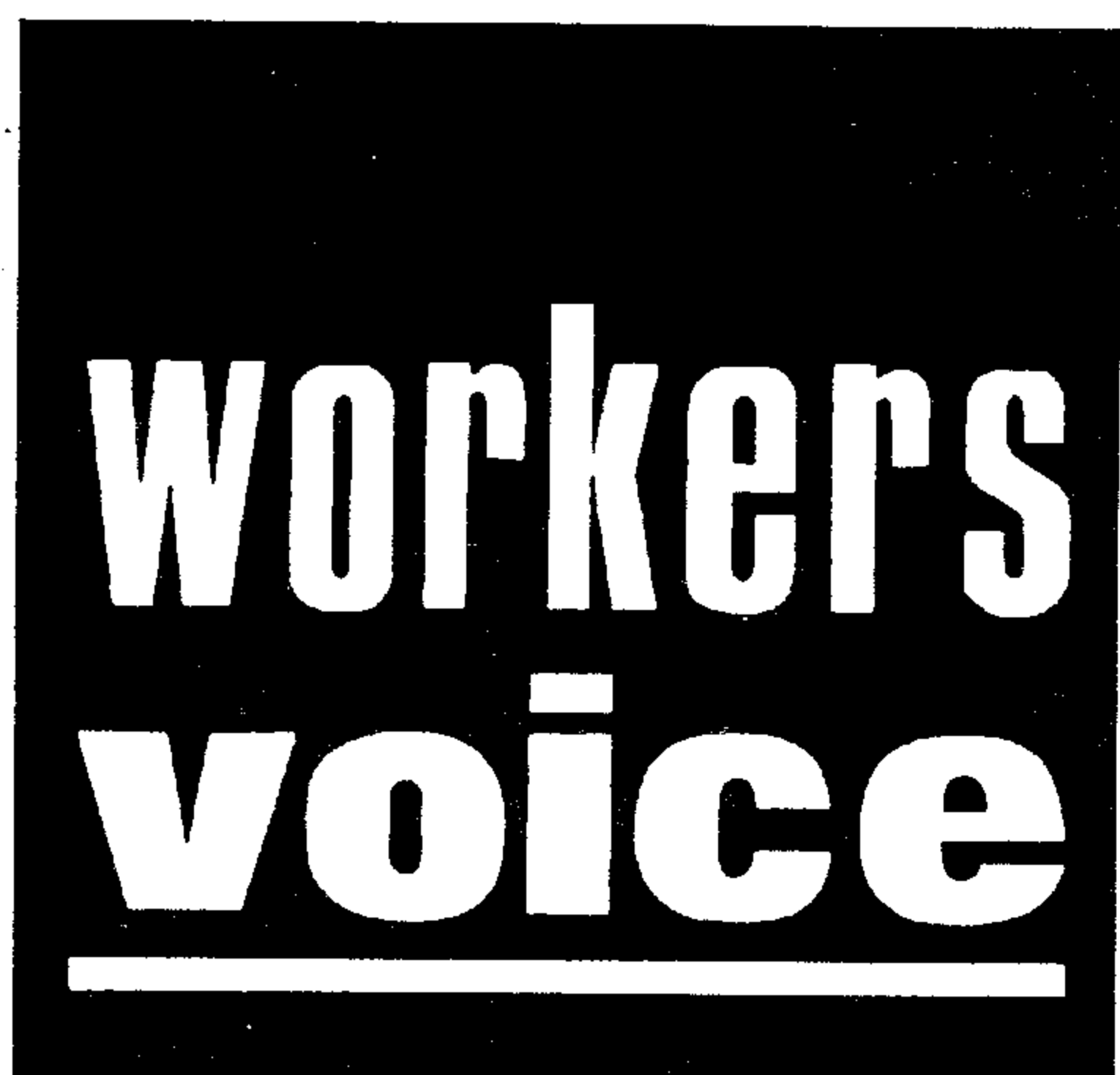
Finally it meant indicating that more wars are on the agenda unless the proletariat, the world's working class put an end to the capitalist system once and for all. Although that was unlikely to happen in this war it was still necessary to raise the slogan of Lenin "Turn the imperialist war into a civil war" - i.e. a class war.

OUR BASIC POSITIONS

1. We aim to establish a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (Marx): COMMUNISM.
2. Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every section of the working class. Their rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.
3. The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual fusion into an international political party for the promotion of world revolution.

4. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for us. It showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned state capitalism. There have as yet been no communist states anywhere in the world.

5. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve - the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of socialism. Join us!



THE CLASS WAR AFTER THE POLL TAX

“Recession”

continued from page 3

military has negotiated \$46 million worth of “clearing up work” in Kuwait for 35 US construction companies. (*Guardian*, 2.3.91) For the US’ “closest ally” ten British companies have been shortlisted to get part of the reconstruction work. Among them are Wimpey, Higgs and Hill, Costain, Lang, GEC-Marconi and Taylor Woodrow (which recently announced a 30% drop in profits). “Long-term, more lucrative work will be discussed later”, announced the *Guardian*’s business page on 4th March. On the same day the *Financial Times* spelled out the implications for the war victors:

... output and employment are still at recession levels in the UK and US. The US February unemployment rate is expected to be 6.3 per cent.

However, the costs of reconstructing the Gulf are bound to lift these economies above their currently depressed levels, and begin to have significant effects on the international capital markets.

Kuwait alone requires an estimated \$100bn for reconstruction, and a similar amount is likely to be needed for Iraq.

The same week the stockmarket share index shot up to a “new peak”. Nothing like a short, destructive war to boost investors’ confidence!

Yet what has the working class gained from all this? In the UK, a few construction jobs for laid-off building workers who will be quartered in a ship off the Kuwaiti shore. A marginal drop in mortgage repayments, perhaps a few jobs ‘saved’ as UK Incorporated sets for another short term of “modest growth”. Internationally, this has to be set against the cost of thousands of workers’ lives and the certainty that at the most a breathing space in the crisis has been bought for US imperialism and its ally.

So the question remains, is there no other alternative for the working class but to passively accept capitalism’s future of more austerity, more unemployment and increasingly destructive wars? At this bleak point in history it may be difficult for workers in the capitalist metropolises, hitherto cushioned from the worst effects of the world-wide economic crisis, to see an alternative. But workers in the ‘advanced’ capitalist states are going to find there are no in-built limits to protect them from the worst that capitalism has in store. The question for the working class is not whether, but how to fight. Before this present rotten system can be replaced with a human society of global producers there will have to be a change in the battle tactics and strategy of the working class. In Britain and in the rest of the advanced capitalist world, they will have to learn that they are part of an international class, that their battles are but part of a wider struggle that cannot be won in isolation. Above all, they will have to take on board a political programme which points the way to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of working class power.

There is a long way to go and the implications of this for the political minorities which make up today’s proletarian political ‘milieu’ remain to be spelled out in a future article. Meanwhile the barbaric consequences of the capitalist crisis will move ever closer to the heartlands of capital. As we move towards the 21st century the working class in the UK and elsewhere in the decreasingly affluent West will be obliged to confront more directly the historical alternative: socialism or barbarism. There is no third road.

The Poll Tax is on the way out. This is a testimony to the resistance of all those who demonstrated, refused to pay and organised against the tax. But let us not forget:

* that Labour councils were as energetic as Tories in prosecuting non-payers;

* that Labour’s Trotskyist infiltrators in Militant offered to help the police after last year’s police-provoked riot in Trafalgar Square;

* that Roy Hattersley spoke for the whole bourgeoisie when he denounced the protesters and not the police;

* that unions like NALGO refused to support a non-collection campaign;

* the hundreds who have been fined and those who were jailed after the police attack in Trafalgar Square last year;

* the tens of thousands who have been prosecuted for non-payment in the last year.

And those prosecutions told a tale about “democratic” Britain. All the supposed rights which the British ruling class boasts of soon vanished in a cloud of expediency. Those prosecuted for non-payment of the poll tax found they had:

no right to consultation with a ‘Mackenzie’s friend’,

no right to have their cases dealt with individually,

no right to speak in the court, except to answer the charge in the briefest of terms,

no right to a trial in open court.

The message is clear. Workers have no rights under the capitalist system. British “justice”, as the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six cases show, is just a matter of convenience for the ruling class.

Let us also not forget that the Poll Tax was

imposed by an arrogant regime which after the miners strike thought it could get away with anything. Its withdrawal by a government now frightened of electoral defeat will mean nothing if we don’t resist the other attacks that are already being made, and which will continue to be made no matter what party is in power.

Fighting redundancies, real wage cuts and rent rises is not easy. These are the skirmishes the bosses usually win because workers usually find themselves fighting in isolation from the rest of their class. If the end of the Poll Tax is going to signal the beginning of a change in the balance of class forces, more workers will have to play an active part in collective actions - Not just when they themselves are directly attacked, but also in solidarity with other members of our class who come under attack. An attack on one section of the class must be seen for what it is - an attack on us all.

The lessons of the defeats of the last decade or so have to be learned before we can go forward. The first lesson is that the unions are only interested in negotiating the terms of redundancies and wage cuts. They are not interested in putting up a real, widespread resistance involving the whole working class.

Gulf War:

Who Won and Who Lost

The press and TV tell us that “we” won and “they” lost. But these pronouns, “we” and “they” are - intentionally - misleading. No doubt, the Iraqi proletariat and exploited lost: not only have a large proportion of them been killed, both civilians in the mass bombing of the Coalition’s “War of the Cities”, and conscripts, another part faces death as it tries to live in cities which have been deprived of sewers, clean water and electricity. The reconstruction of the cities, if and when it takes place, will be at the expense of the proletariat, and if the reparations that Iraq has agreed to pay are in fact paid, it will be on the basis of increased exploitation. If reparations are not paid, who will starve if sanctions are intensified? The Iraqi proletariat.

The Palestinian workers in Kuwait have also lost. 6,000 of them are now in the not so tender custody of the liberated police of Kuwait.

The Iraqi bourgeoisie has also lost, but not in the same way as the proletariat. Saddam Hussein may yet lose his head, and the lower reaches of the bourgeoisie may be pushed into the proletariat, but the bourgeoisie as a whole will continue to exploit the rest of Iraqi society and live at its expense. If reparations are imposed, it will get its rake-off for managing them.

Now to “us”. The workers in the Coalition countries will suffer materially relatively lit-

They are frightened of what would happen if they lost control over “their” workers and they will oppose any independent organisations of workers who aim to unify the struggle and challenge the existing order.

The second lesson is that none of the existing parties has anything to offer. They are all capitalist parties and we should not be diverted by the traditional election side-show. A change of capitalist government won’t lessen the attacks. It will only throw up ideas for new attacks. Our defence lies in our own organisation.

Above all, workers as a class must begin to remember their own history. We have to see each struggle as part of a larger whole. We must be conscious that our fight is for a better world without exploitation and that as long as capitalism exists that attacks will continue - from wage cuts to wars. We have to prepare to fight the system politically and that means developing an awareness of the possibilities of a new system of organising the production of wealth. This means building a political party of class conscious workers independent of all Trotskyist, Stalinist and other capitalist programmes. The CWO seeks dialogue with anyone who shares this aim.

tle compared to their fellows in Iraq, but weaponry and wars must be paid for and it is the workers who will do the paying. Nevertheless, in the Western partners the costs of the war will be but a drop in the ocean of what workers will pay as a result of the recession (which was on its way before the Gulf crisis - but this won’t stop some from claiming it was a result of the war, as if capitalism would work nicely if it were not for the psychopathic tendencies of those nasty capitalists). The real war loss to workers is the propaganda advantage the bosses will get from the war. They will say that this war shows that, at least as far as “we” are concerned, war is about as dangerous as a trip to the nearest video games arcade.

And this brings us to the winners: not a classless “us”, but the bosses in the Coalition countries.

We apologise for the omission of Part Two of “70 Years of Ulster’s Orange State”. It has been held over for the next issue.

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Communist Review 9 - available from the group address. Also available: *Documents from the Conference on the Crisis in Eastern Europe* (held in Vienna, Feb. '90), price £1.